

DECE 25th  
Anniversary  
Issue

March/April 1996 Volume 131 Number 4

# LUTHERAN EDUCATION



- *A Family Affair*
- *Polka Dots to Praise*
- *Multi-Age Classrooms*
- *Parents as Partners*
- *Art Masters and Little Ones*
- *Dealing with Death*

# Lutheran Education

Since 1865

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This is a banner issue, consistent with the journal's tradition of designating its fourth of the five per volume as a special emphasis product that both honors and highlights one of the departments of the Lutheran Education Association.

The Department of Early Childhood Education celebrates its twenty-fifth anniversary this year and is, indeed, responsible for suggestions for the topics and the authors in this issue. As befits the largest of LEA's departments and the significance of its ministry, both topics and authors represent an unusually high caliber of professionalism.

*James Schlie* and *Lori Hayes Aadsen* make insightful commentary on one of the fastest growing areas of educational service that Lutheran churches have inaugurated in the last decade or so, namely, day care from birth onward and enhancing communication and help for parents. Professionals of all stripes are used to thinking of "in-service" opportunities. Growing support is now being seen for the idea of in-service help for that most significant of all professions, parenting.

*Judy Christian* contributes to both parental and professional needs in understanding the child's growth in the capacity to worship and grasp the meaning of worship. Nicely done, as is *Sheryl Reinisch's* article on multi-age classrooms. Her efforts should strike a familiar note with hundreds of Lutheran educators for whom multi-grade and multi-age classrooms have been a necessity, not an option, for generations. What is unique about Sheryl's presentation is that it deals with the kindergarten and early childhood levels in general.

This reader was particularly impressed with *Maxine Fiala's* program of discipline-based art education on the kindergarten level. If any generalization may be drawn from that effort it is that all of us teachers can fall into the trap of under-estimating learning capacity for whatever level we happen to be assigned. Inspiring, to say the least.

The poignant account of the death of a first grader in *Julie Fahr's* class and how her children reacted to the tragedy evokes, in some respects, memories of the recent tragedy in Scotland. Death and young children do not seem to fit together in our equations. Yet God's calculus is not ours. It is part of the Christian vocation to submit to His mysteries, much as we chafe against them.

Woven among all these gifts so far mentioned are *Milton Rudnick's* charming and moving "Witnessing" story and *Ted Peters'* exhortation to "Build Schools" from a brief article he wrote for *Dialog*, the publication he edits. Worth pondering.†

## In This Issue

## *Most Influential*

Among life's mysteries for me is why I remember certain events and not others. On some kind of scale of importance there seems to be little difference between one occasion and another and yet one remains clear and salient while the other dims quickly and is discarded.

So it is with a casual comment made by Herb Gross when I was a student and he a still youngish faculty member. In class he had said many a thing that I am sure he deemed more significant, but it was a simple statement involving postal cards that stuck and sticks in memory. His comment?

... Have a stack of penny postal cards in your desk. (See how long ago this happened? A penny postal card, indeed!). Whenever you hear of something notable someone has done . . . or read about it . . . or were told about it . . . dash off a commendation on the postal card and mail it immediately. Time involved? Two minutes. Investment in good will? Enormous!

It takes such little time for such a thoughtful act, rich in kindness to say nothing of civility. Why it's not practiced in this way or others (phone call? casual contact? walking down the hallway to a colleague's office?) remains a bit of a mystery.

Years ago such a card came my way from a student I hadn't seen for at least five years. He was somewhat of a vague memory by that time so it was with a low-energy double-shock that his message appeared in the morning mail. He was attending a seminary at that time and as a kind of "exercise" in one of his classes, the professor suggested that each class member send a thank-you letter (or card) to someone in their background who was influential in a way perhaps not recognized at the time . . . or acknowledged . . . and "make up" for such a lapse in gratitude. I say this not to seem boastful since I also cannot honestly say in which way or ways our mutual contact justified such an acknowledgment.

*Matters*  
*of*  
*Opinion*

But this I know: the impact of receiving such a brief but sincere assessment put this instructor on Cloud Nine for at least a week, not to mention the many times he was warmed emotionally by recalling the incident as time went by.

A few weeks ago, my wife and I were honored by being asked to evaluate responses by first through eighth graders to the simple question, "Who was the most influential person in your life?" Our parish school does something like this every Black History Month (February) and it is always a rewarding experience to be asked by our most excellent principal to serve in this capacity.

Would that all of our readers would have access to the minds and hearts of these children as their essays were read. One could guess, correctly, that mothers led the list although fathers, grandmothers, aunts, cousins, uncles, teachers, brothers and sisters also found their places in this minor league Hall of Fame.

Minor league, indeed!

If most of the developmental theorists are right, these early experiences produce indelible marks on the ultimate realization of a person's mature self.

What sifted through the words of praise was that the influential person so treated did not simply provide information or skills or small acts of kindness, although this latter trait was also high on the list.

Rather what came through was that the most influential person *took time* with the child to patiently lead him or her to a higher ground not yet achieved.

Simple, isn't it?

As simple as writing a postal card, we would guess.†

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### On Civility

If civility really is in danger of going out of style, it is largely because of what is now *in* style in our popular culture. In the name of personal freedom, people here have long since accepted that anything goes, as long as it is not clearly identified as a criminal offence. This is partly a reaction to traditional social strictures which stifled individual expression and helped to maintain the domination of elites in our society. Be that as it may, the ethos of "letting it all hang out" has dealt a heavy blow to civility, because it is just the opposite of self-restraint.

*Royal Bank Letter, May/June 1995*



*Lori Hayes Aadsen*

## *Preschool: "A Family Affair"*

Do you agree that the primary building block for a child's education begins in the home? Do you agree that a child's first teachers are his or her parents? So where better to explore the beginnings of a child's faith development than within the family?

This is all true and it sounds good, but wait a minute; this is the 90's. What is the definition of a family today? Who prepares parents for this awesome responsibility? Do busy parents actually have time to nurture and train their children up in the Lord?

Ideally, God intended the family to be a place for faith training, a place where father and mother working together, share the tasks of teaching, disciplining, guiding and nurturing children. Parents had mentors nearby in the form of extended family such as grandparents or aunts and uncles. These individuals, as well as the church, served as a support system for faith development and the raising of the children.

What about life in the 90's? How has all this changed? What about households where there is no training at all? How can the church change with the times and reach out, remembering our Lord's words, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these the kingdom of heaven belongs." (Matt 19:14 NRSV)

### **Families in the 90's**

There is no such thing as the average American family anymore. Do not expect families to be comprised of a mom, a dad, a sibling or two and a dog. Families in the 90's are as diverse as colors in a rainbow. Some of the more frequent situations in families today are reported by the U.S. Census Bureau.

**\*Double Income:** Fifty-one percent of mothers with children under one year work outside the home. The percentages shift upward to 56% with children

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*Lori Hayes Aadsen works with the early childhood program of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in Houston, Texas and is an early childhood consultant for the Texas District (LCMS).*

under six and 73% with children six and older in the workforce.

Two-income families are stressed and rushed. The majority of precious time together is spent preparing meals, cleaning, laundry and other daily chores. Parents are exhausted, and children are often neglected. There is little time for extra activities such as reading, playing or outings. The American family mind set in the 90's can be summarized as stressed-out. Economic pressures and the demands of family life are fraying parents nerves.

**\*Single Parent:** Today, more than 15 million kids live in single parent homes. Part of the stress for these families is financial and that there is only one parent to do all the work. In addition, children in these families often go back and forth between two households. This can be inconsistent and confusing.

**\*Extended Families:** According to the U.S. Census Bureau, over 3 million children live with their grandparents instead of their parents. This trend is due to divorce, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy and financial hardships. This is a 50% increase over the past 10 years. There are benefits for children living in an extended family situation, but they may be more likely to live in poverty and feel guilt over why their parents left them.

### **\*Cohabiting Families:**

Today more than 2.6 million couples live together outside of marriage. This number has doubled within the past 10 years, reports the U.S. census bureau. The children in these families may be from another marriage and tend to have difficulty with commitment and morals because of what they have experienced at home.

**\*Step Families:** 60% of divorced people already have children, and three out of four remarry. If this trend continues, your school and church may have more step families than traditional families by the year 2000.

### **So Why Family Ministry?**

A growing number of churches and schools are discovering the importance of a comprehensive ministry of care that includes education and support for parents as well as the care and nurture of children. Our preschool and daycare programs are a wonderful avenue for beginning family ministry. The age range of birth through the elementary years is the most crucial developmental time of a child's life. Teaching and nurturing must be provided for infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and elementary children that has its foundation in a personal, living relationship with Jesus Christ. Accordingly, providing parenting skills are an essential



component of a contemporary family ministry.

Many church staffs are realizing that the most strategic point of entry for the unchurched family is through the preschool or family ministry program. It has been well documented by Search Institute that a major reason for the return of Baby Boomers to the church is a desire to obtain religious education for their children. According to sociologist Wade Clark Roof of the University of California, Santa Barbara, the largest group of church dropouts now returning to church is made up of married couples with children. 96% of church members, and 73% of unchurched people say they want their children to get religious training, says a Princeton Religion Research Center study. These studies tell us that a solid family ministry program is a key drawing card for families looking for a church.

It is also recognized that the church can serve as a support system for families in the absence of (or in addition to) the extended family. Churches that are effective in reaching the Boomers and Busters who have children recognize the necessity of having adequate facilities, professional staff, and trained volunteers to minister to children and their parents. Effective Family Ministry today is complex and requires skilled and committed

leadership.

### **Family Ministry That Works**

The range of issues addressed by family ministry today is diverse. What are the important components of a quality program? Search Institute identified ten vital areas.

1. Teaching Bible stories.
2. Developing Bible knowledge.
3. Teaching moral values.
4. Learning how to apply faith to everyday life.
5. Providing fellowship or social interaction.
6. Providing classes to help parents learn how to promote the faith of their children.
7. Informing parents of student progress.
8. Providing classes for parents on effective parenting and communication.
9. Awareness and understanding of other faith traditions.
10. Discussing local or national issues as they relate to raising children.

Your school may already be doing many of the above ministries, but consider trying some new approaches to accomplishing your goals. With the high percentage of working parents, a majority of your family ministry programs must be scheduled around the work day. Remember too that you may have numerous families in your



congregation who do not have their child enrolled in the preschool. Think outside the bounds of your school families and include invitations to others in your church and community.

It is very important to strive to make every family ministry event "kid friendly" and "parent friendly." Have you ever noticed that more and more retail stores and restaurants have discovered that if they make kids happy, the parents will be happy too? For example, stores have strategically placed well-stocked play areas in their stores so parents can enjoy shopping without whining kids. Restaurants offer outdoor play areas and crayons at the tables. This is not by accident. Retailers know their sales will increase if the kids and parents are happy.

What are the implications then for family ministry? The Boomers (post WW II) and Busters (born between 1965-1980) are looking for belonging and quality. If the church prepares a "kid friendly" environment it sends the strong signal that the church values them. They compare the services the church has to offer with those they encounter at the mall, grocery, or local McDonald's. They reason that these places are prepared for families and the church should be also. If the Family Ministry program is sensitive to needs, and prepares a quality "kid

friendly" environment, the average family will return.

**Below is a check-list of ideas to consider in planning a Family Ministry program.**

1. Write a mission statement and goals.
2. Survey adult needs before offering events.
3. Plan fun age-appropriate activities for all ages. (2 yr.-elementary)
4. Provide an up to date, clean, safe nursery. (0-2 yr.)
5. Provide meals at evening events. (Most families come straight from work.)
6. Arrange carpools.
7. Provide resources for parents to take home. (Devotions, activities, developmental tips)
8. Recruit and train staff and volunteers.
9. Always include a spiritual dimension even at recreational events. (devotions, Bible study, prayer)
10. Provide resources for outside agencies. (counseling, medical, daycare)
11. Plan to involve young children in worship.
12. Conduct surveys regarding new ministries. (Latch-key, baby-

sitting co-ops, parents night out, etc.)

### **Family Ministry Models**

Our preschool, daycare and elementary schools are viable, effective models for educating children and bringing them up in the Lord. The long history of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in the area of education is unsurpassed. We have the opportunity to augment our rich heritage of care and nurture of children with family ministry programs. Our churches are rediscovering children and turning to innovative approaches of providing solid programs to respond to the changing needs of children and their parents in the 90's. A creative, strong family ministry program will invigorate the church's entire ministry.

Here are a few models that have been proven effective in many congregations. However, keep in mind that each congregation is unique, and what works in one, may not work in another. You will need to tailor your ministry based on needs, demographics, and the gifts God has given your particular congregation.

### **Parenting Classes**

Many congregations are offering parenting classes on a regular basis as a part of their Sunday morning Bible study series. Other

opportunities exist by offering a brown-bag lunch class or an evening class coupled with activities for children. Professionals from the community may be utilized or use any one of the excellent video series available.

### **Bible Clubs**

Bible clubs are an effective way to reach elementary school children. These should be age specific and fast-paced. Active learning methods such as drama, music, art and games are essential since children this age do not need a repeat of school. Clubs reinforce Bible learning, life application, and fellowship.

### **Puppet Clown Ministry**

Puppets and clowns can be an integral part of any family ministry program. They can be used during Sunday School, VBS, preschool or even the worship service. Teams are formed comprised of adults and teens who enjoy drama and working with children.

### **Children's Church**

While taking children out of the worship service is not a traditional Lutheran practice, it is becoming more and more viable for churches in the 90's. Some congregations are experiencing young parents who will not come to church if they must struggle with a wriggling child. One approach is to

keep the children in worship for 20-30 minutes, and then dismiss them to a children's church to go more in-depth at an age-appropriate level on the sermon text. Children may be reunited with their parents for the conclusion of the service, or picked up following the service. The key to this approach is to make children feel a part of the worship. Let them know they are going out so they can learn about the sermon in their own way.

### **Family Sunday School Bible School**

A very effective training ground for parents is the family Sunday School or Bible School approach. Here, parents see teachers model teaching the faith and begin to learn skills that they may use at home. Teachers become mentors for young parents, partnering together in the development of their child's faith. In this atmosphere parents begin to feel like they have a support system for parenting. They also experience fellowship with other parents with children of similar ages.

Consider alternative times for Bible School. Do not fall into the pattern of thinking it must be one week long during the summer. Try one evening per week all summer, or two or more sessions one week at a time. This way families can sign-up for the session that best fits their schedule. Another idea is to include seasonal Bible School around holiday themes such as Christmas or Spring

break.

### **Special Events**

Well-planned special events are a fantastic draw for families and the community. Implement one new event per year and soon you will have a selection of events sure to please. Here are some ideas:

**Wild, Wacky, Water Day:** A family afternoon filled with water activities such as water gun fights, water balloon races, water slides and snow cones. Devotional themes centered on water are included.

**Easter Egg Extravaganza:** An Easter egg hunt with carnival games, prizes, and crafts. The devotion can be presented by puppets, clowns or a drama team.

**Children's Fair:** A fun-filled day outdoors with pony rides, crafts, dunk tank, ring toss relays, gunny sack races, petting zoo and food. Here is a great opportunity for teens to help out. The puppet or clown team can present an outdoor production. This is a way to become very visible in the community so they can experience your church's care for families.

**Prenatal Ministry:** During pregnancy, expectant parents ask many questions about raising a child. Even couples who have not been active in church are feeling vulnerable, and open to what the church has to offer them. By meeting the needs of these future parents, a

church has to offer them. By meeting the needs of these future parents, a prenatal ministry can develop a bond between young parents and the church. Some components may include: mentoring partners, parenting library, childbirth classes, Christian parenting classes, nursery orientation and information on baptism. Specialized help can also be offered for high-risk or teenage pregnancies.

### Conclusion

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 tells us: "These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when

you lie down and when you get up."

Proverbs 22:6 also speaks to us: "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."

The Bible is clear that parents need to be involved in spiritually training their children. Parents have more influence than anyone else on their children's faith, yet they need and want help. Lutheran schools and congregations have been blessed by God with vast resources for assisting parents in the important task of bringing up their children. It has been said that it takes an entire faith community to bring a child to Christ. These are our children! The time is now!✠

### References

- (1) "Boomers and Busters" *Leadership Journal*, Spring, 1995.
- (2) *Children's Ministry That Works!*: Group Publishing, 1991.
- (3) "Children's Ministry. . . It's Not Church Babysitting," *Leadership Network*, Tyler, Texas, November 28, 1994.

### Kids Who Cope

Kids with high self-esteem and confidence in their ability to interact effectively with their peers use three strategies to handle stress, say researchers at Loyola University and the Capable Kids Counseling Center in Chicago.

- They rely on at least one caring adult for support.
- They assume responsibility either by trying to change the situation or by convincing someone to act differently.
- They pull back from the situation to rejuvenate themselves for awhile.

Poorly functioning children tend to cry, yell, scream, or fight. They may either act as if nothing is wrong or do something dangerous or risky.

--*Working Mother* (June 1994)

Milton L. Rudnick



## Witnessing

*(This story sounds almost too good to be true, but it is true. Even the dialogue is about 90% as originally spoken. Although it took place more than forty years ago, it was so powerful an experience as to be imprinted indelibly on my memory.)*

I hadn't been in my first parish long before I knew we had a problem. This was a struggling little old congregation on New York's Lower East Side which had been in decline for more than fifty years, but decline was not the problem I refer to. The problem was a six year old by the name of Billy. He did not come to Sunday School often, but, when he came, it was a disaster. Billy was nothing but trouble. He never listened, or so we thought. He disrupted his class constantly--punching the other students, leaving his place, talking out loud in inappropriate ways. He was the despair of his teacher. No one knew what to do about him. We were relieved on those Sundays when he didn't show up.

Billy did not have much going for him. He was from a very poor and broken home. He was malnourished and somewhat crippled. He had a nervous twitch. All this in addition to and, no doubt, contributing to his obnoxious personality. He lived in a tenement apartment about a mile from the church and parsonage across many very busy streets.

Late one afternoon about the time rush hour traffic was at its peak my doorbell rang. When I answered it I was surprised to see Billy there, holding the hand of a little girl about his age. "Billy," I asked, "what are you doing here?"

"This my friend Celia, Pastor. She doesn't know anything about Jesus, so I brought her here so that you could tell her about Him."

I could hardly believe my ears. Billy, whom we thought never listened or cared, brought his little friend all that way across some of the busiest streets in the world so that he could introduce her to Jesus. I invited them in and sat them down. What I said next without even thinking about it surprised me almost as much as what Billy said. I was not even sure that I believed it, but the words came out anyway.

"Billy," I said, "you know about Jesus. Why don't you tell her about Him." To my astonishment, Billy replied without any hesitation and with complete confidence.

“Celia, Jesus was the nicest person who ever lived. He was so good to everyone. If they were sick, He would make them well. If they were hungry, He would feed them. If they were sad, He would cheer them up. He was so nice. But some bad people hated Him and one day they caught Him and they hurt Him and they killed Him.”

“I think I heard about that once,” Celia interrupted. “They stuck arrows in Him, didn’t they?” (Probably she was thinking of the spear.)

“But, you know what? He didn’t have to let them do that,” Billy quickly added. “He wasn’t just a man. He was God, too, and He could have stopped them. But He let them do it anyway, and you know why Celia? He did it for us, so that God would not have to punish us for the bad things that we do.”

Deeply moved, Celia responded, “Aw, He shouldn’t have done that.”

“But He didn’t stay dead,” Billy explained excitedly. “Three days later He came back to life again. He went to see His friends, and were they ever glad to see Him. Then after a while He went back to heaven again, but you know what, He’s still here anyway. We can’t see Him, but He’s here all the time. And, when we’re good it really makes Him happy, and when we’re bad, it makes Him sad. And, some day, Celia, He’s going to come back from heaven and we will be able to see Him, and He’s going to take us to heaven to be with Him forever. Isn’t that wonderful?”

Poor little disturbed and obnoxious Billy, who never seemed to listen in Sunday School or to care about the Lord, was deeply concerned about his friend and her need for the Lord, and he did something about it. Despite all of his personal limitations and problems, he gave the most beautiful witness I have ever heard. We often feel inadequate when the time comes for us to speak up for our Savior. But one thing is sure -- if Billy could do it, so can we.✠

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### To The Point

“About half.”

- Pope John XXIII when asked how many people worked in the Vatican.



## *From Polka Dots and Plaids to Praise*

A sign reads, "Reserved for Parents with Children." Anticipation mounts. The music begins. The young children, seated in their "special" place, are fascinated, transfixed by what they see. One particularly curious child reaches out with a small hand and gently touches the brightly colored dotted fabric of the woman's dress in front of her. The woman turns to give an indignant frown. The child's mother responds with embarrassment and removes the offending hand. A puzzled expression passes over the child's face.

This child and countless others experience worship in similar ways. Instead of the rich visual images found in worship they are presented with the polka dot, plaid, or striped fabric of the worshipers in front of them. It is inevitable that they quickly respond with "childish" behavior because, after all, they are children. Christians firmly believe that young children are members of Christ's body through baptism; however, we sometimes fail to demonstrate our conviction to our children as they enter into the "family" life of our congregations.

One Good Friday a three-year-old child, seated in the second to last row of pews in the sanctuary, began building a tower seat of hymnals. Her co-conspirators became all of the adults seated around her. One by one they each gave up a hymnal as soon as they realized that she was in the process of solving a personal problem.

When the hymnal tower was level with the top of the pew, she seated herself on the pile of books with much aplomb and contentedly observed and asked questions about the events taking place.

Children, if they are to feel a part of the worshiping community, must be in a position to see and in the common life of the church. The community of the Gospel is an inclusive baptismal community. In a unique way we can use the gifts of each member within the community to enrich the worship of all. We need to advocate for the place of children in the church and look for ways to learn from them.

Worship at its best encourages wonder and awe by offering a means for

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*Judy Christian is Director of Child Ministry of the Board for Parish Services of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod*



entering into biblical and liturgical stories through actual experiences. Worship at its best is experiential--oral, auditory, tactile, and visual. Young children experience worship in the same way they experience all of life--with their senses. The candles, parament colors, communion, music, a smile or a frown, seating proximity, and all other experiences are absorbed and interpreted by even the youngest worshippers. The spoken words in worship are perhaps only incidental to the young child, but the significance of participation in worship is formative.

### **Should Children Be Included?**

Many congregations are struggling with the question of whether or not children should be included in worship. The more pertinent question is "How do we include children in worship?" The gathering of believers of all ages strengthens a child's sense of who God is and how we respond to Him. In Matthew 18:3-5, Jesus seems to suggest that welcoming children in His name, while at the same time learning from them, are tied together. Children can be significant contributors to worship and the life of the church, lifting up by their natural wonder, spontaneity, and awe things that adults may set aside as less important. Naturally eager,

wondering, honest, and open in their expressions of trust and in their acclamations of praise, children can help inhibited adults understand and experience the power of authentic celebration. Congregational worship that involves children and adults *together* illustrates to both what it means to belong to, and celebrate our life as, the body of Christ.

Worship belongs to all ages. Well-planned, it promotes the development of a vital and enriching interplay between grown-ups and children, in the presence of God. Through the power of the Holy Spirit faith is nurtured through shared participation in the celebrations of our faith. Children and adults are equipped for ministry together as we intentionally include our children in the liturgy. Christian education can be linked to this process in a profound way.

Our goal is to create environments that enable young children to encounter and worship our Lord. These environments include home, school, and church. In these places children need to abide in God's love, experience biblical stories and liturgical presentations, engage with adults in living lives of witness and service, and share a life in friendship with God through prayer. When our celebrations of faith (worship) become central to the experience we share with our

children the Christian faith will come to life for us and for them. Homes and classrooms need not be totally transformed for this to occur. Rather, we are challenged to consider class time and home time as worship time, in addition to time spent in congregational worship.

### **Begin In The Classroom**

Worship-centered classrooms are places where adults and children can experience God's story together. Ordinary time and space becomes sacred time and space when teachers are prepared for, and comfortable with, the biblically based theme for the day and when the physical space of the room is orderly, welcoming, and enticing for children.

Transforming the classroom into sacred time and space requires thought, understanding, and prayer. A worshipful atmosphere in the classroom is important because it sets the mood for all that is to happen in that time and space. It allows the child the freedom to wonder and to experience God's love for him or herself. It says, "You are welcome here. Come, learn, and experience God's love with us."

Many children are not brought to congregational worship with their parents. How can they be expected to actively participate in worship and learn how to worship if they never experience worship? A

learning environment that provides a worshipful atmosphere can help students grow in the understanding of worship so they are able to participate more meaningfully in celebrations of faith with the congregation, grow in love for God and others, and experience the love of Jesus. When the classroom environment and curriculum conveys the message, "You are respected here because you are a child of God, precious in his sight; God is respected here; in this place we can be with God, talk to God, listen to God, and hear the stories of God," the learner feels hope and a sense of belonging. Within such an environment educators focus on the strengths and capabilities, of children, rather than on their limitations. Activities are selected that are sensitive to each child's capacity to learn. They nourish children's natural curiosity, drive to discover, and desire to become competent members of their classroom community.

Teaching for worship is intentional and well prepared. Children are allowed and encouraged to lead within an environment that is carefully organized for interaction with the biblical stories of faith. The role of the teacher includes both designing a worshipful environment and collaborating *with* children by supporting their efforts to learn. The

thoughts and “wonderings” of each child are valued. The children learn to appreciate the ideas and wonderings of others in the class by first knowing that their own thoughts and ideas are welcomed by the teacher. The teacher encourages this behavior by carefully listening and responding to *every* child. The teacher encourages questions and helps children organize their questions and ideas, translating them into manageable activities. The teacher also carefully monitors children’s individual and collective development and uses this information to create and reformulate learning experiences to fit children’s continuously changing needs.

The liturgical year offers an excellent strategy for teaching both children and adults the core stories of faith. Bring reminders of the liturgical year into the classroom. Use napkins, candles, and other decorations, bulletin board backings and themes that reinforce the colors and themes of the seasons of the church year. Print newsletters, and notes on paper that reflect the colors of the season. Make a classroom liturgical calendar. As children mark off the days of each season, watch how they begin to eagerly anticipate the coming of the next seasonal and color change. Make a point of displaying beautiful pictures or art prints that capture and define the

themes of the church year. Encourage parents to engage in similar activities in the home. Enlist families to design and create banners that highlight the different seasons.

Create classroom paraments and have children bring them to the worship area and then place on the classroom altar. Make a visual statement each season by removing the previous season’s cloth(s) and laying the new one(s). Including children in this act will make the experience more meaningful for all of them, even those watching, because observers will be anticipating their own opportunity to participate in a similar way. Make a dramatic moment out of every exchange. Repeat this (and other ways in which you have chosen to highlight the changing seasons) at the beginning of each new liturgical season. Children enjoy anticipating the familiar.

Remember the holi-days. Plan classroom celebrations (parties) around the church year. Have an Epiphany party, a Pentecost party, etc. Help children experience the joy of the pivotal events of Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost by surrounding them with concrete visuals that appeal to their senses. Prepare grand celebrations. Let the children see that our faith is a faith of great joy and celebration. A greater use of

festivity that includes drama, dance, and music underscores the importance of these events.

Class time that is worship-centered can move through the following liturgical components: gathering, remembering/telling, feasting, and sending. As we *gather*, God calls us to join His people at all times and in all places by remembering our Baptism as we invoke the name of our triune God, claim His mercy and join in songs of praise. It is the sacrament of baptism that provides the opportunity to celebrate God's promises to everyone in a congregation, but especially to its children. Although children baptized as infants will not remember the moment of their own baptism, each baptism they witness can highlight for them the story of that special time when they were welcomed into God's family. Tangible reminders--baptism banners, classroom recognition of baptism birthdays, baptism memorabilia, candles, music and personalized baptism stories are helpful for making the sacrament meaningful for children.

Activities that serve to *gather* the children together in God's name include: welcoming at the classroom door with words such as, "I praise God that you are here." or "God kept you safe through the night."; attendance; opening conversation;

singing and listening to Christian music--including hymns and portions of the liturgy (be sure that all songs have significant words. Music is a powerful teaching tool and ought to be selected and used responsibly); introduction to the biblical story and related theme of the day; opening prayer.

Consider seating children in a circle and then joining them there. In this configuration everyone is included, no one person is left out, and no one person has more value than another. All adults and children have the *same* opportunity to share, listen, and support one another. Together, the children form a community of believers as they listen to each others' stories and experience the Bible story of the day.

Jesus' story becomes "our" story as we *remember*, *tell*, and *participate* in the stories of faith. Bible stories may be told in several different ways. However, it is essential that the learners experience the story *as well* as hear it. When the storytelling is complete, the children need to have the opportunity to respond to what they have heard. Young children are often not able to do this orally. Rather they respond better through interactive experiences that enable them to move beyond acquisition of "a basket of facts" to life application. An opportunity to respond through art, drama, or play

using story-related props is ideal. The creative process allows a child to think new thoughts, try new ideas, change things around, and discover things that they have not thought of before.

Activities can be followed with a simple confession of faith, "I believe . . ." Activities that involve children in remembering include: gathering for the story; listening for the silence. (Wonder can be stifled by noise. Many times, we create that noise by our need to fill the silences with our own words. It is healthy to listen and "Be still, and know that I am God." Psalm 46:10a NRSV); the story presentation; wondering questions; musical response; free choice time that includes interest center activities chosen to reinforce the theme for the day/week/month.

### **Preparing for the Eucharist**

Jesus invites us to eat and drink in the uniquely Christian celebration of thanksgiving, the Eucharist; proclaiming His death and resurrection until He comes again and witnessing to our fellowship with Him and with one another. Obviously, the Eucharist is not celebrated in an early childhood classroom. Cookies and milk ought not be considered a substitute for the bread and wine of the sacrament. However, ways we involve children in the sharing of a meal can prepare

them in a small way for the activities of the Christian community around the table of the Lord. Activities that involve children in feasting include: sharing of the peach (whole group activity); giving and serving (distributing napkins, drinks, and snack foods); presentation of gifts (birthday and/or baptism birthdays or other gifts to share); prayer; review of the day. Encourage children to engage in conversation during this time, with an emphasis on saying thank you to one another and to God. A prayer created by the children can then be prayed.

The Holy Spirit shapes, nurtures, and equips us to go into our world and extend the gift of Jesus to others. The sending component seals the group experience, and is highly significant. Plan a special closing and dismissal time each day. Speak a blessing to the children individually, with words such as, "Go in God's care" or "God bless you." Call each child by name and affirm them not because of their accomplishments, but because of who they are--children of God. Activities that involve children in the *sending* include: good-byes to each child by name, distribution of take-home materials; emphasis on each child's mission as a disciple of Jesus and an invitation to return again.

We need to take Jesus' words from the book of Luke to heart by

welcoming children to worship, by blessing and affirming them as Jesus did, and by including them in a wide variety of ways. In worship we tell and re-tell in ritual and song the story of salvation. We establish our identity as part of God's family, finding our place in the long history of God's people of which we and our children have become a part through baptism.

### **Being Part Of The Story**

I have a quilt that belonged to my mother and my grandmother before her. My grandmother died shortly after I was born, but I came to love her and that quilt as my mother told and retold of its origin. Stories were shared of poverty endured during the depression and about the people who wore the clothing from which the colorful fabric squares were cut. As a young child I fingered the polka dot, plaid and floral patterned pieces and dreamed dreams about the people they represented. Without the richness of the stories of the past, my quilt is just another old quilt--meaningless to anyone else. It is, however, my treasure, because the experiences of others became my experiences through the careful and repeated telling of the family "story."

The "story" will not end with me, for the quilt and the stories of the lives of the people it represents will be passed along to my children.

So it is with worship. It may be a meaningless patchwork of ritual to those who have not experienced its mystery and wonder through the words, action, and examples of those who know and cherish it. Most of us would agree that we cannot go back to where we once were because, individually and collectively, new experiences change the way we understand the world. New and fresh approaches to what is old will emerge. However, we must not lose that which has nourished us through rite and symbol and through rhythmic repetition. Christ in His church invites us to see and engage, feel and touch, be aware and grow, and be transformed. As we keep His story, which is also our story, alive through liturgy, ritual, and song, we renew our participation in a tradition extending both backward and forward in time. We are a crucial link in that process. Let us teach our children to "love the quilt." Let each of us take it upon ourselves to create sacred time and space that helps our children move beyond polka dots and plaids to praise!✚



*Ted Peters*

## *Build Schools!*

Pastors and congregations should build schools! High quality Christian day schools especially at the elementary level could provide a distinctive opportunity for evangelism and educational service.

Why should we limit announcing that our God is a gracious God who loves and forgives sinners to a seventy-five minute Sunday worship? Why should we limit telling the story of Jesus and his significance for our eternal life to a fifty minute Sunday School? Why whisper the gospel like a dirty family secret only among our own inherited clan?

The time is ripe for sharing the gospel outside the church. Educating children in the '3Rs' is itself a worthwhile task. And when integrating the '3Rs' into a Christian frame we could help children draw a world view in which all things are pictured in relation to the God of grace. Amidst a merciless cross-fire of differing world pictures in the pluralistic battleground that is our society, an education that orients children meaningfully and wholesomely would be welcomed by many families.

The time is ripe especially for two large groups: drug-hit families and Baby Boomers. Characteristic of the first group is the presence of children with grandparents but the absence of parents. Substance abuse has rendered mothers and fathers unemployed, unhealthy, and sometimes uninterested in their children. The grandparents step in and, overwhelmed by the child's abundant energy, show up on the schoolhouse steps looking for help in putting their world back together. Public schools can provide the '3Rs', to be sure; church schools can provide a full ministry.

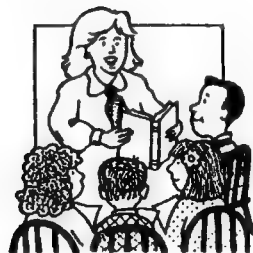
Then there are the Baby Boomers, 75 million born between 1946 and 1964. 81% of the men and 88% of the women say they are Christian, though only half of these attend church six or more times per year. 13% of the men and 8% of the women say they have no religion. Dubbed "Lay Liberals" by Donald Luidens, Dean Hoge, and Benton Johnson in *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers* (Westminster/John Knox 1994), these people are more experiential than dogmatic and are tolerant of truths found in religions outside Christianity. And, right now, Baby Boomers are into parenting. They're having children, and they want to put these children in good schools, even Christian schools. 96% believe religious instruction is important for their children. Even 71% of those who say they are "unreligious" affirm the church's role here.

Lutherans are good at education. However, too much Lutheran day school education in the past has served only to seal leaks in a dogmatic boat blown by conservative sails. I recommend that we take the best from the past, chart a new course, and launch a ship of day school education that will sail new seas.† *Dialog*, Spring 1995, Ted Peters, Editor



*Sheryl Reinisch*

## *Multi-Age Classrooms: One School's Experience*



In recent years, there has been renewed interest in multi-age classrooms across the United States and Canada. The multi-age classroom (sometimes known as mixed-age or non-graded) places a group of children at least a year apart in age together in a learning environment. The intent is to optimize what can be learned when children of different as well as the same ages and abilities have opportunities to interact.

Multi-age classrooms are not new. In the U.S. they were the norm until the beginning of this century. Remember the one room school house? Smaller rural and parochial schools often have multi-age classrooms, although many still separate children by grade levels.

In recent years, school districts around the country have been taking another look at multi-age classrooms. In Orlando, Orange County Public Schools piloted their first multi-age classrooms in August, 1992. Due to their success, additional multi-age classrooms are being implemented each year.

Parents must request that their child be placed in a multi-age setting. Often there is a waiting list for children to get into these classes. While most mixed-age groups in Orange County are in the primary grades, recent requests by parents have resulted in multi-age classes for children in the intermediate grades.

Prince of Peace Lutheran Preschool and Kindergarten began its first multi-age class in August of 1994. The following school year, two additional classes were transformed to mixed-age groupings. Three out of nine preschool classes are now multi-aged. Parents have a choice between multi-age or traditional classes for their children at each age level--two and a half to four years.

### **Advantages of Multi-Age Classrooms**

Multi-age classrooms resemble family and neighborhood groupings which traditionally provide informal socialization and education. Such environments offer more diverse and socially integrated play experiences in terms of the types of play and the age and gender of children's play partners (Berk and Winsler, 1995).

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As in a family group, younger children are provided with opportunities to observe, emulate and imitate. They benefit by being given opportunities for more complex play experiences. Mixed-age group interaction elicits specific prosocial behaviors such as helping, sharing and taking turns, activities important to a young child's social development (Katz, Evangelou and Hartman, 1990).

Teachers of multi-age classrooms may accumulate unique benefits as well. For various activities and tasks, older helpers are available to younger children. This can help decrease the younger child's dependence upon the teacher for help and attention. The teacher has more opportunities to facilitate learning.

Children in multi-age classrooms are usually with the same teacher for more than one year. This allows for a stronger bond between teacher and child to develop. Children are more secure with a teacher and learning environment they are already comfortable with. Continuity in learning increases.

Teachers already know the children who are in their second or third year of a multi-age class experience. They are familiar with each child's developmental progress. Establishing clear and specific developmental goals for individual students can be done with more ease

due to the relationship already established between teacher and child.

### **Getting Started**

At Prince of Peace Lutheran Preschool and Kindergarten, the idea for multi-age classrooms began with teachers discussing possibilities for the future in an informal setting. Ideas were bounced around while creative and innovative plans were discussed. Not all ideas and plans materialized; however, *enthusiasm* began to grow.

Several months later, a parent asked that multi-age classrooms be considered at Prince of Peace. The parent was a teacher of a Kindergarten through Second Grade multi-age class in Orange County and was enthusiastic about its successful results. She became a mentor as the possibilities of starting a mixed-age class at Prince of Peace were explored.

Particular circumstances also created opportunities for change. Such was the case as summer approached, and an afternoon three's class had few students enrolled. Meanwhile, the afternoon four's class was full with a waiting list. A Board member, whose child was in a multi-age class at a local public school, suggested trying a multi-age class. The idea was met with enthusiastic response and soon after the decision was made to implement the

preschool's first multi-age class.

The big question was, "How?" During the summer, two teachers attended a two day workshop sponsored by the Orange County School District on multi-age classrooms. The workshop was presented by Marlene Dergousoff, a leading advocate for multi-age classrooms from British Columbia, Canada.

It was found that many of the practices associated with successful multi-age classrooms such as learning centers, theme-based curriculum, individual and small group activities, hands-on activities, etc. were already implemented at Prince of Peace. The biggest change was adding more than one age level to a classroom.

Parents whose children completed the afternoon three's class were given first opportunity to be in the multi-age classroom. Advantages of having the same teacher in a familiar environment and increased leadership opportunities promoted the concept of the multi-age classroom in a positive manner.

The initial multi-age class was quite successful. The concept of mixed-age grouping was promoted through newsletter articles, handouts and brochures throughout the year. Prior to registration for the following year, a representative from Orange County Public Schools addressed the

issue of multi-age classrooms to interested parents, answering many questions and sparking increased enthusiasm.

### **Observed Benefits**

There are currently three multi-age classes at Prince of Peace. Teachers have already observed positive results. One of the most significant is the increased self-esteem of the older children in the classes.

From the first day of school, the older children are provided with leadership opportunities. For example, on the first day of school, children who were in the second year of the multi-age program were asked to show the "new" children around the classroom and tell about the various centers in the room. Rather than a teacher-directed experience, it became child-directed and initiated. The "new" children learned quickly from their peers.

On a daily basis, older children may be asked to help guide younger children through a particular project, a new computer game or learning activity. Parents have stated that children come home and tell with pride how they helped "teach" a fellow classmate. New skills that have been mastered by the older children are reinforced as they "teach" younger ones, providing for an excellent source of review.

Younger children benefit as well. One such example is of a two and a half year old named "Jason." As a child experiencing a school environment for the first time, Jason had difficulties focusing on any type activity. The difference in maturity level between Jason, the older children, and even those who were the same age as he was quite apparent during the first weeks of school. In order to help Jason adapt to the class routine and environment, his teacher asked an older child to assist Jason in certain tasks and routines.

The result was beneficial for both Jason and the older child. Jason learned quickly from his peer. Jason has adapted well to classroom environment and routine. His teacher feels that much of his success is due to his being provided the opportunity to emulate an older, more experienced classmate.

The older child, who tended to be more of a "follower" was given an opportunity to lead. His self-esteem increased through this experience. His mother stated that she's noticed he now has more tolerance for younger children. She has observed him sharing more frequently and participating more often in cooperative play.

Another parent, whose child is attending his second year of a multi-age class stated, "The continuity has fostered a real sense of security for Andrew. It has helped him develop leadership skills."

The implementation of multi-age classes has been very positive in our experience. Observing the children grow in new dimensions has been beneficial and rewarding. We recommend mixed-age groupings for any type of early childhood program.†

## Resources

- Berk, Laura E. and Winsler, Adam. *Scaffolding Children's Learning: Vygotsky and Early Childhood Education*, Washington DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1995.
- Davis, Rodney. *The Nongraded Primary-Making Schools Fit Children*, Arlington: American Association of School Administrators, 1992.
- Katz, Lilian G., Evangelou, Demetra and Hartman, Jeanette Allison. *The Case for Mixed-Age Grouping in Early Education*, Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1990.



## *Partnering With Parents*

We live in a difficult time for child care centers and individuals providing child care services. We also live in an age of accountability--a time when parents demand responsibility and are greatly concerned for the safety and security of their children. One might ask if this is true even within the Church and the child care centers it sponsors.

We also live in an age where there is a great diversity of family forms. There are increasingly fewer "traditional" families where fathers work and mothers stay home, a situation that creates a greater demand for child care outside the home. Less than 10% of families fit the "traditional" mold, and some have speculated that this statistic holds true even within the Church community. We also hear from child development experts that the typical child will spend more hours in child care before she enters elementary school than she will spend in class throughout her entire elementary school career.

The implications of these trends for child care providers and for child care centers is enormous. Turmoil in society and within the family causes an erosion of confidence in traditional organizations. Although families rely heavily on educational centers for help in raising children, they also challenge these very institutions. Incidents of misconduct at child care centers may be relatively rare, but they are often widely reported in the media and sensationalized to the point that they raise anxieties, concerns, and fears of every parent who has a child in child care. Every time there is an incident of misconduct at a center more trust is lost, even if the center in question is thousands of miles away.

If we are to build trust and foster confidence in our child care centers we must begin by building a strong partnership with the parents. The essence of this article is on how to develop strong partnerships and relationships between the families and child care providers. This partnership must start with the initial contact, be carried out on a day to day basis, and be based on positive interaction

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and open communication.

The relationship of families to child care providers has changed dramatically from what it was a few years ago. Child care formerly was provided by neighbors or friends with the family physician serving as the expert on child development. Today a child's care is provided by adults employed in large centers that are governed by a host of government-initiated standards and requirements. Today's experts are often the child development center staff.

Child care may well be viewed as part of the extended family, and, where this is the case, the role of the care provider is greatly expanded. Many parents now rely on the provider for their source of information on child rearing and aspects of child development making it increasingly imperative that a partnership between the parents and the providers be formed.

Parents enter child care for many different reasons, and some do it with great anxiety and reluctance. In addition to the guilt they may already feel for not staying home with the child, "horror stories" of other families' experience with child care may cause them anxieties and fears about such things as:

- what illnesses children come home with;
- what kind of training a provider has;
- what will happen in case of fire;
- whether the child will get enough to eat;
- the frequency with which diapers will be changed;
- the methods of discipline;
- whether the child will be crawling on dirty, cold, tile floors;
- whether the child will identify a parent as Mom and Dad, or lose interest in them because she prefers her provider;
- how long it will be before the child is attended to when he cries;
- whether there will be enough stimulation and attention to emotional needs.

Finally, and perhaps indicative of the extensive fears of parents, is the concern that the children will think that parents do not love them because "We're giving her away nine to ten hours a day."

On the other hand, providers may have pre-conceived perceptions about the parents that bring their children to child care. Some of these include:

- that children who live in families where both parents work are raised to be more independent and self-reliant than those children where the mother stays home.
- that because parents are so busy today, many children don't have proper discipline at home and that is why we have so many behavior problems in full day child care.
- that many parents are not interested in quality child care. They just want to know what the hours are and how much it will cost, as if such care is a bottom-line purchase of a service.
- that parents don't have their priorities straight. They don't want to pay for good quality child care, yet they will spend "tons" of money on material possessions and vacations for themselves.
- that there are some children

who receive more attention at the center than they do at home.

- that working parents often take the providers for granted and don't appreciate what they do.

This list is by no means complete, but it begins to show how essential it is for child care providers to foster a partnership with parents by modeling good communication patterns and by building confidence in the parents' relationship with the staff.

One of the things providers often do not know, unless it is specifically observed through a child or parent's behavior or unless a parent speaks out, is the amount of turmoil, struggle, and pain the family is experiencing in its daily life. Child care providers are not psychologists and counselors. However, if family problems or stresses are extensive, it will affect the child and the care provided by the center. Thus it is vitally important for care providers to regularly interact and talk with parents when they drop the child off in the morning, or when they pick him up at the end of their day.

Gaining information about the family is important. An excellent way to do this is to ask questions about the child. How does the child



relate with brothers, sisters, and other family members? How does the child like to be talked with? Are there certain ways the child likes to be held? What are the favorite foods the child enjoys? Are there some foods that she/he cannot eat? What are the child's typical daily activities? What fears and anxieties does the child exhibit? While providing the care giver, indirectly, with important information about the family interaction, this type of conversation also provides an opportunity for the parents to share their observations, feelings, and concerns for their child.

Parents have great expectations and concerns about what the child care provider is doing with their child, and when many of them do not see their children for nine to ten hours of the waking day, they often don't know as much about their child as the provider does. Care givers, therefore, have much information to share with parents.

Because they are experienced in watching children develop, they can, for example, identify the toys that are appropriate for certain ages, or they can identify a child's favorite game and tell the parents how they play with other children. The care giver also knows what stimulates and challenges the child. These observations are especially important when the child is the first or only

child. Providers also have the opportunity to share with parents how their child talks to other children and what is said about their feelings and activities at home.

In essence we have a two-way street: the parent comes to the provider with a certain type of information, and the provider brings to the parent different observations. Often these facts and feelings are not known by the other party. Sharing them can serve to reduce anxiety and lead to solving problems. Sometimes it helps the parents reinforce at home what the care giver is attempting to do at the center. The bottom line is to foster healthy interaction with parents and improved interaction with the children.

No matter how hard the care giver works at building and strengthening a relationship with the parents, there are times when the parents are going to be upset or angry, either about something that occurred or about the child's interpretation of what occurred at the care center. Generally such conflict comes from misunderstanding and miscommunication. If one looks deeply enough, it probably is about an established policy or procedure that requires clarification of what occurred and how the problem was handled. Careful, attentive, active listening to parental concerns, coupled with reasonable discussion

and a plan for resolution will go a long way toward resolving any problems.

Many families need help, particularly young parents, and those who bring their first child to day care. Many of them are overworked or have limited incomes. They may be single parents who are under tremendous pressure and stress.

One might ask if it is the center's responsibility to provide support to these families. Should encouragement or information on problem solving be provided? The key to answering this question is to be responsive to parental stress and its impact on the child's emotional behavior and development. By simply providing a listening ear and reassurance they are being helped, helped to take that next step in coping with and reducing the pressure.

Most families will not resist suggestions and comments from people who they believe care for them and their children, but will, in fact, seek advice on child rearing and other issues. When this occurs the providers may, if they feel comfortable and knowledgeable, explain how family pressures and stressors are affecting the behavior of the child.

Symptoms of parental stress may include any of the following: they are short tempered; they get

frustrated easily; they may want to talk about their child's behavior, when in fact they wish to speak about their own personal relationships and feelings; or they may seem disorganized and unsure of decisions that need to be made.

Several ways a provider can cope with these situations: (1) Do not serve as a therapist. (2) Do not raise expectations that the care giver can solve their problems for them. (3) When parents talk, listen. (4) Don't create more problems for them by giving inappropriate advice. (5) Let them talk rather than discussing the bad behavior of their child that particular day. (6) Schedule a future quiet time to discuss concerns, particularly if the timing is inappropriate. (7) Maintain a friendly, supportive, encouraging attitude.

Occasionally a parent, out of personal desperation or because there is great trust in the provider, will share personal information. In this situation there are three things that can be done:

1. Set a boundary on the relationship, based on the limits of the care provider's professional role and personal relationship with the parent;

2. Stay within a specific level of expertise (i.e. providing a listening ear does not mean that one serves as a therapist. Suggestions on

how to solve a particular marriage problem or abusive situation is most likely not within the provider's professional skill areas);

3. Help the parent make the decision to talk to someone with the appropriate professional skills, such as a counselor, or pastor.

What can be commented on in meetings with parents are observations of the child's behavior. If a provider anticipates a parent coming for personal problems, or if the provider needs to talk with the parents regarding their relationship with the child, ensure before-hand that there is available a referral listing of the various organizations in the community that provide support and counseling.

When parents are struggling with their own personal stressors, their ability to positively interact with the child is limited. This may lead to behavior of both the parent and the child that is highly inappropriate. Frequently, expectations for the child are also out of line. This is an appropriate area of professional expertise for the care giver to provide information, support, and guidance to the parents. The key is knowing where one's boundaries and limitations are and what are the crucial points of intervention.

It is also important to keep records of interaction with the

parents, particularly the suggestions that are made regarding the parent-child interaction, or the interaction of their child with other children. Many parents just need reassurance about relating to their child, and care givers can provide that reassurance by modeling healthy interaction with the child. Parents will pick this up and try to emulate such at home. While helping parents improve their interaction with their child, one is also helping reduce the stressors within the family. By creating an environment that is conducive to positive interaction, a family's coping mechanisms can be strengthened.

There is nothing magical about providing quality child care. To develop an effective program the participation of families must be solicited and encouraged. Entering into a partnership with parents develops a team approach and has a synergistic affect. To increase responsiveness to the children, it is imperative that the care giver knows the parents and their families. Then when parents present problems and stressors in their own family life, the care giver is more prepared to be supportive, friendly, and helpful. To ensure success in partnering with parents, staff must be trained and encouraged to develop and model healthy communication patterns.✚



## *“Was Rembrandt a Friend of Van Gogh?”*

This was the question five-year-old Katie asked when our class discussed Rembrandt's sketch of an elephant. Four months before, we had used a reproduction of Vincent Van Gogh's *Starry Night* while studying the thematic unit: NIGHT. She had made a connection between these two Dutch artists.

When Ian was at the kitchen table painting a tree, he surprised his mother when he said, “Look, Mom, I’m using pointillism like Seurat.” It’s amazing what kindergarten children can learn when serious artworks are incorporated into their learning.

In my classroom, art is no longer just the “cutesy” craft projects children do around seasons and holidays or a 15-minute “draw a picture” for an activity following a story or lesson. This all changed when I developed a kindergarten curriculum using art masterpieces to teach the alphabet thematically. For example, for the theme of LOVE, chosen to study the letter L, I used Picasso’s masterpiece of *Mother and Child* because it depicted such a beautiful, loving relationship between a mother and child. I could easily incorporate religious art pieces like Raphael’s *The Sistine Madonna*.

An important stimulus for this approach came from Prairie Visions, The Nebraska Consortium for Discipline-Based Art Education (DBAE), a program that is funded largely by the Getty Foundation. Their three-week Summer Institute on the Visual Arts is designed to prepare teachers to incorporate DBAE into their classrooms. DBAE is a comprehensive teaching and learning process that includes art history, art criticism, aesthetics and art production. This institute, appropriately, was held among the great art works in two of Nebraska’s important galleries, the Joslyn in Omaha and the Sheldon in Lincoln, and was staffed by some of the Midwest’s leading art educators.

I returned from that institute filled with ideas about how I could incorporate DBAE into my kindergarten program. My principal enthusiastically said, “Take it, Max, and go!” I sought help for selecting art pieces from a colleague who teaches

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art and from members of the Concordia--Seward faculty. I also found numerous additional resources and materials in the Concordia library. The program was to become an exciting venture and would put new zip into my teaching.

Since art could readily be integrated into the curriculum for young children, I chose themes that would both appeal to them and create an environment of discovery and creativity. Such an approach would provide access to a variety of cultures and a knowledge of life long ago. Equally important, the children could take an active role in their learning experience. Each week became an adventure as the class studied an art masterpiece which became the basis for numerous activities. Although the activities centered on a letter, the chosen theme permeated the entire kindergarten curriculum.

At the beginning of a study, the "helper for the day" introduces the letter. This letter is a colorful, child-size puppet. (Parents helped paint the puppets at a work party in the summer.) The letter puppet hides in appropriate places throughout the school and church. For example, Mr. B was in the Boy's Bathroom, Mr. P. Was in the Pulpit where the Pastor Preaches. When the puppet is found, the child proudly brings it into the room and places it on a stand. A child (usually one whose name begins

with the letter), wearing an artist's beret, unveils the masterpiece selected for study. The letter person and this masterpiece become the focus of daily activities. Then I introduce the theme.

Children love to play, so we used PLAY for one of our themes. Winslow Homer's *Snap the Whip* was an especially good choice for the letter P. Our kindergartners observed the barefooted boys wearing overalls and playing that game by a red school house. A 90-year old lady from our congregation visited our classroom and described games she and her classmates played at recess long ago. After recess, the kindergarten children enjoyed making comparisons of Homer's boys to our games and play. Chelsi painted a scene of her friends jumping rope and playing on the merry-go-round and swings. In her painting all the children were smiling except one who had tears coming down her cheeks. What an expressive painting! It gave me an opportunity to discuss her feelings while playing during recess.

Animals are especially appealing to young children, so they chose ones that were of interest to them. Some of the themes and art pieces have been FISH: *The Goldfish* by Paul Klee; LION: *Lion is Awake!* By Wang Yani; ELEPHANT: *Circus Elephants* by John Marin; and

*Peaceable Kingdom* and *Noah's Art*, by Edward Hicks--each with a wide assortment of animals. Two books especially helpful in selecting art pieces about animals were Charles Sullivan's *Alphabet Animals* and *Animals Observed: A Look at Animals in Art* by Dorcas MacClintock.

Another favorite theme was HATS for Mr. H. After introducing the theme and discussing Thomas Sully's *Torn Hat*--a portrait of a boy wearing a straw hat--we became involved in numerous activities. We studied hats representing different countries and different occupations. One day was declared HAT DAY, and children brought hats from home. One girl's was a hard hat worn by her daddy in a factory. Many brought sport hats (football helmets, baseball caps), sombreros, Chinese hats, Russian fur hats, and fancy ladies' hats. We had a parade to other classrooms and to the church office, and we showed them to the cooks in the school cafeteria. Children made a graph in math and studied occupations where people wear hats. A member of the congregation taught the children the German song, *Mein Hut Er Hat Drei Ecken*.

This art approach can readily be applied to social studies, writing, and music. Children find the artist's country on our map or globe (such as Japan and Mt. Fuji, as depicted in

Hokusai's *The Great Wave*), observe clothing styles from the artist's era (clothes worn by children in paintings by Francisco Goya or Auguste Renoir), see a variety of homes (such as those in New England, painted by Grandma Moses), compare landscapes of scenes of the West painted by Albert Bierstadt with the Nebraska landscape, and examine artifacts from various cultures. We transform the classroom with poems, storybooks, big books, posters, songs and activities for other curricular subjects, including science, social studies, math and music. The masterpiece and its supporting activities also give children numerous ideas for writing (with inventive spelling) and sketching in their journals. Sometimes the interest is so high we remain on a theme longer than anticipated, and at times, this interest motivates children to suggest different themes they want to study.

The theme unit climaxes when the children make their own masterpiece. During the study they have opportunities to observe and discuss elements of art (line, shape, color and texture) as they paint, make murals (for example, a herd of elephants on Africa grassland), make sculptures and "stained glass," design Chinese scrolls, make collages and cut and paste portraits, weave Navajo mats or form clay pots. After their

masterpieces are completed, time is allotted for "Show and Tell."

The children's masterpieces are displayed in the kindergarten's "art gallery" (walls in the hallway by our classroom). I mount and display them with the famous art masterpiece and DBAE art concepts. I also display their stories and panels written from taped discussions. The kindergarten art gallery creates a center of interest for the entire school. Eighth graders stop to see it on their way back from the lunchroom. Parents and grandparents stop after church to admire the latest art masterpieces.

The program reaches beyond the classroom and the school corridor and brings positive benefits to our entire school and community. The kindergarten, as well as other classes, regularly display art in our art gallery (carpeted walls with track lighting) located in the cafeteria. My students also have shared their creations with the Seward community in colorful exhibitions at several restaurants, banks, and the Civic Center.

Their art pieces are put in individual art portfolios and placed in a canvas art-print rack in the classroom. Children may refer to them or even take them out to add some "finishing touches." The portfolios are shared with parents at parent-teacher conferences. At the end of the year, each child and I

select two that will be passed on to the next grade to be placed in their new art portfolio.

Since I respect the children's need to explore, I give them freedom and time to go to the art center to experiment and create with art materials (crayons, markers, colored pencils, various sizes of paper, scissors, glue, colored construction paper, magazines, etc) throughout the day. And they still do enjoy decorating the room with seasonal crafts.

One of my goals is to motivate the children to be creative and to express their ideas. I appreciated a note from Ilisa's mother that reaffirmed my intentions when she wrote at the end of the year that "Ilisa's artwork was an extension of herself, which was provided in your kindergarten program. It was so stimulating and non-threatening. Our daughter gained confidence in expressing herself and the growth was obvious when looking at her self-portraits drawn in September and May."

Many parents have become actively involved in the program. Ashley's daddy, the mayor of our town, said, "You should listen to our dinner discussions now. Her mother and I have to guess the letter and possible themes. We love it." Parents sometimes prepare snacks correlating with the theme. One



parent with an outstanding collection of Native American pottery and artifacts (I discovered this during my summer home visit) held the children's rapt attention for more than 45 minutes--and the children came away with a greatly enhanced view of Native American culture. The parent, a construction contractor, felt he had done something special for his daughter's class.

However, the students benefit the most from this program. For example, Michael's parents warned me that he was unable to sit and use any fine motor skills. He couldn't even write his name legibly. Early in the year, Michael became so fascinated with the study of TIGERS that he checked all the libraries for books about tigers and other large cats. He designed a zoo in the building block area. Soon the children were bringing in their collections of animal figures. During his free activity time, over a period of a month, Michael painted picture after picture of tigers. With his enormous imagination, he dictated a story in very colorful language. I made it into a book, which motivated other children to do the same. Michael wrote and sketched in his journal; his writing skills improved immensely. His self-esteem rose and his face just beamed because of his success and the praise that accompanied it.

This coming year I plan to incorporate some of Reggio Emilia's philosophy and ideas for communicating children's thoughts and emotions through the visual arts. These are explained in detail in *The Hundred Languages of Children* (Edwards, Gandini and Fjorman, 1993). The Reggio program integrates nicely into the thematic approach in our curriculum, where children as well as their parents are involved.

Our school values both the visual and performing arts, and these are important items in the school budget. This emphasis has been picked up by parents as well. Parents and other interested people receive Teachers' Christmas Wish Lists. Last year the parents of one of my students purchased a 10-book series written for young children. *Getting to Know the World's Greatest Artists*, by Mike Venezia, is a great resource for biographies of famous artists. Another important work purchased with school funds, Ernest Raboff's *Art for Children*, a series of sixteen biographies of artists, has proved invaluable.

My colleagues who teach art in the classroom, as well as my principal, also have attended the Prairie Visions Summer Institute on the Visual Arts, and this experience is reflected in the classroom programs. Two large art prints,

rotated from classroom to classroom every two weeks, are prominently displayed in the rooms. This year each class studies in depth the lives and artworks of four famous artists. The program is coordinated by an art curriculum study committee. The level of children's knowledge of art and art productions have greatly improved as evidenced in our school art gallery.

A number of philanthropic organizations and foundations in various states are involved in improving the level of teaching in both public and private schools. One of Nebraska's leading foundations, the Peter Kiewit Foundation, sponsors an annual Excellence in Teaching Award, given annually to 20-teachers in Nebraska for innovative programs. My "ABCs and the Art Masterpieces" was selected for one of the awards in 1994-1995, and our school received a \$5,000 grant for our art program. We were able to add prints, books, posters, videos, CD-ROMs and other educational materials for art. If you have developed innovative projects, you should apply for similar grants or awards in your state. It could be an important addition to your

curriculum, and would contribute much to your students' future development.

In summary, I feel my program helps generate joy in learning, develops creative thinking and enables children to communicate their feelings. The children learn to make decisions. The program has helped them, as well as me, develop appreciation of individuality as they critique famous artists' works and each other's. Because of the self-confidence the young program participants develop, they are willing to try new things. They gained all this while learning the alphabet and learning to read. In addition, the students have a foundation for a lifelong appreciation of the arts.

"Was Rembrandt a friend of Vincent Van Gogh?" asked Katie. I answered, "Wow, Katie, that is a good question. They both lived in Holland, but Rembrandt lived more than 200 years before Van Gogh. Both loved to paint and their artwork became very famous. Who knows, Katie, the next time you visit an art museum you may see actual works of these artists. Then you can appreciate them even more!"†



## *Dealing with Death--First Grade*

Each year, as the new school year begins, I am reminded of something one of my college professors said while I was preparing to become a teacher. At the time it didn't seem quite so pertinent as it does to me today. He said that no matter what we teach, no matter what we do in our classrooms, we should always make sure that we prepare our students for life, everlasting life. I have come to know through my experiences what a marvel it is to be able to be a part of God's plan in my students' lives.

It was an extremely cold Monday, February morning. As I drove the 16 miles to school, I was busy thinking that we were going to decorate Valentine boxes and get ready to sing for church in a week or so, along with all the other important first grade things I had planned. I didn't realize that today was also our 100th day of school for this year until I got to school and saw all the things that the kindergarten was going to do to celebrate 100.

The day began and proceeded as every other Monday did with the exception of having recess in the gym because of the extreme cold weather.

Andrew had been warned not to slide on the gym floor for safety reasons. After the second warning (and a near collision with a brick wall), I asked Andrew to sit on the bench for the rest of the recess and during recess tomorrow. As he sat, I saw him looking at the bottom of his shoes and saying, "I guess I need new shoes--these are just too smooth!"

When we got back to the classroom, we talked as a class why we shouldn't slide on the gym floor. Andrew explained to us that it is just too dangerous! After a short discussion, it was time to get ready to go home. Who but God would know that my goodbye hug at the end of the day would be my last here on earth from Andrew?

That evening we had a PTL meeting and blaming the cold weather, my husband and I left to go home early. When we arrived at home we were met at the door by our daughter who informed us that the Bailey's had been in a car accident

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and Andrew was in surgery in Fremont.

Without hesitation, I called back to my principal and we left immediately to get to the hospital about 40 miles away. When we arrived we found Andrew's parents, grandparents, Pastor and other family members waiting for surgery to be over.

As we sat and waited, we shared Andrew's misfortune in the gym and half-heartedly I shared, "I guess this how Andrew gets out of sitting on the bench tomorrow for sliding on the gym floor."

After awhile, the doctor came to share with us that surgery was over and that Andrew was in recovery. Things had gone well, although he had lost a lot of blood. We were very hopeful. After informing us of what the injuries had been and what had been done, the doctor left us with the hope that Andrew would be all right.

All of us joined together in prayer and thanksgiving that life had been spared and with hope that health would be restored.

As we left the hospital, Andrew's grandmother took my hand and thanked us for coming. She also shared with me that A.J. was looking forward to our Valentine's party. I assured her that I would get his Valentines to him. With a hug and a smile, we left the hospital thinking only how long it would be before

Andrew would return to school.

On my way to school on Tuesday morning I wondered how I would share this news with his classmates.

At faculty devotions I shared with the staff the hope we had been given the night before. We all felt a bit relieved to know life had been spared. As we sat and visited, the principal was paged for a phone call. My husband had called with the news that at 4 a.m. Andrew had been "Life Flighted" to Omaha and was in surgery again there. His condition had worsened.

By this time, school had started and I knew that I had to let the first graders know what had happened. Inside I was still clinging to the hope of the night before. As we (my aide and I) went about the routine procedures of the morning, I frantically searched for the perfect devotion for such a day as this. I found one that I thought would work and with all the strength I could muster I went before the class. I remember beginning by telling the students that I had bad news and I proceeded to tell them the details, as I knew them, of the accident. I don't really recall the exact conversation, but I do remember one of the students asking, "Will Andrew ever be back at school?"

Without hesitation I said, "Yes, of course!"

About that same time, my aide said that our principal wanted to talk to me. My heart sank as I walked to the door to see him standing there with news of Andrew! He was gone. In total shock I went to the office wondering what do I do now. What now!

The kindergarten teacher who had taught these students last year went to the class and gave them the news that Andrew had been called to heaven.

After composing myself the principal and I decided we needed to call the student body together for a prayer service. Pastor was called and would be there as soon as possible.

I felt the need to get back to the students. With God's help, I went back to the classroom, to twenty-one little tear stained faces and one very caring and compassionate aide who was leading the class in a touching discussion of memories of Andrew. We cried and laughed together remembering our friend and classmate. We felt sad knowing that he wouldn't be with us, but also happy knowing that he was in heaven with Jesus. Almost every child had a special thought or memory to share.

Before we went to the gym for our prayer service, we all took our tissues knowing that we just couldn't keep from crying yet knowing it was all right to cry. After our prayer service with the student body the

other students returned to their classrooms. We just didn't feel much like leaving when one of the little boys said, "Mrs. Fahr, can we sing 'Have No Fear Little Flock?'" I said I thought that would be great. So there we sat amidst our sadness, with God's reassurance that only little ones can express so beautifully singing "Have No Fear Little Flock." What a touching tribute to our heavenly Father in remembrance of our friend Andrew.

Needless to say the hours and days that followed were full of the gentle touch and guidance of God's gracious hand.

The day following Andrew's death we were contacted by the local newspaper and asked for an interview. The local people were interested in how we were handling this tragedy. We were questioned: "How many counselors had been called in?" "How were the students coping, etc.?" Both the principal and I shared that we had been offered professional counseling from other sources and that we had decided not to call them in at this time. We explained that by God's grace we are saved through Jesus Christ and we have the promise of eternal life in heaven. Each day we can share this with our students and now we knew that Andrew had received the fulfillment of that promise.

During the course of the days

to follow, whenever Andrew's name came up, we stopped what we were doing and talked. We talked about everything from what a dead body feels like to what the funeral home looked like.

After a lot of thought and prayer, my husband and I thought it would be helpful to set aside a special time when the first graders could visit the funeral home to see Andrew's body. We made arrangements with the funeral director to be there when the children came. The evening before, I went to view the body to prepare myself for what I would share with the children.

On the day of the visitation, at school we talked about what we would see. One of my students had visited the night before and he and I shared with the others what we saw. We talked about the coffin, the flowers, what Andrew's body was dressed in, even to the details of the clock, pictures and light fixtures of the funeral home. With God's help, the students were not afraid of death but rather were able to face the reality of death as a passage into life.

Saturday was the day of the funeral. Twenty brave little First Graders sang their hearts out to "Jesus Loves Me" and their favorite, "Have No Fear Little Flock." During the service the Pastor used a picture of heaven that Andrew had drawn in school.

Following the service, we went into the cemetery. After the Committal Service, a few children lingered with me asking lots of questions like, "Now what will they do with Andrew's casket?" "Will they just drop it down in that hole?" "How deep is it?" "What will they do with the flowers?"

The next week at school Andrew's parents asked to be able to bring in pizza for the children. Andrew's father wanted to thank the class for being Andrew's friend and for being such a witness at the funeral. The students shared special memories with the Bailey's along with smiles, a few tears and lots of hugs.

Throughout the remainder of the school year Andrew was remembered quite often. When handing in papers, I many times forgot and called Andrew's name. The students were quick to remind me, "Mrs. Fahr, Andrew's in heaven!"

During religion time or devotions we would remember Andrew. When we had questions I couldn't answer, I many times would say, "I'm not sure but when we get to heaven we can ask God." One day I had said this and one of the students said, "You know, that's not fair, Andrew will find out those answers before we do!" Oh, for the faith of a child!

At the end of each school year, it is tradition to take a field trip. My aide and I planned several places to take the children, one of which was a nursery/greenhouse. A friend of mine was the manager there and I had mentioned it would be nice to get flowers and take them to Andrew's grave. She fixed a beautiful little lamb planter for our visit.

When we got to the cemetery, the grave had not yet been sodded so we could easily see the shape of the grave. In the dirt over the grave were three holes. I assumed they were snake holes but when one of the children asked, I said that I wasn't sure. One of the girls, as only a first grader could say it said, "I'll bet that's for the Father, Son and Holy Spirit!"

The next week at school I asked the class if they liked our field trip and if it would be a trip that next year's first grade would enjoy. They all agreed, "Yes!" But one child wondered, "What if no one dies?"

As the events of this school year unfolded it was no coincidence that Andrew's last memory verse was John 11:25, "He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies." It was no coincidence that the children were preparing to sing, "Have No Fear Little Flock." It was no coincidence that our daily devotions from "My Devotions" fit the situations just perfectly. It was no coincidence that the year before one girl in our class lost her baby sister to SIDS and was able to share with the class her experience.

It was very apparent to me that the hand of God was working to bring everything together as He in His divine wisdom and power called Andrew to His home in heaven.

I thank God for allowing me to be a part of His plan and for giving me twenty-one of the best counselors. I am constantly reminded, Oh for the faith of a little child.

To God be all the glory and praise!✝

## Assessing Assessment

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Talk

The topic of assessment is probably the most timely topic in schools today. Many administrators and teachers are perhaps attentive only to the results of standardized tests which generate school and grade averages. These educators are primarily engaged in traditional classroom paper-pencil examinations administered to the entire grade. Probably some of the following questions are *not* given sufficient consideration by the entire faculty:

- Are we serving *all* students in our school equitably--do all children have the opportunity for *success* in learning?
- Which students do we need to serve better? Since school enrollments are becoming more diverse, are our procedures and materials applicable in assessing this changing population? How do we know that these changes and improvements are successful?
- To what extent is our standardized testing program aligned with our curriculum and with the learning objectives set by the school? Do our present measurements accurately inform us? Is there sufficient data gathered and analyzed to make valid determinations of pupils' progress?
- How specific is the faculty in identifying learning needs of individual students and making appropriate modifications in the curriculum or methodology?
- Is there meaningful documentation of learning progress? Is the entire faculty looking toward improvement of *school-wide* successful learning rather than merely in their own classrooms?

Beyond these basic questions, administrators need to review the



following statements with their faculty members and thereby solicit their interest, discussion, and possible application:

1. What *multiple* assessment package can be designed that will capture the essence of the school's goals and truly demonstrate that learning or change is taking place?
2. What interventions, changes, and modifications should be designed or initiated that will cause desired learning improvement?
3. Are faculty members aware of the many assessment options and are they skilled in utilizing them where appropriate?
4. Do we really know what we want students to learn? Have we fully discussed and agreed upon common school learning objectives much less have them written, assessed, and documented? Is the school's vision via a well-written mission statement determined, understood by all, and adhered to?

In the final analysis it is the local faculty members that are the specialists in determining children's learning needs and monitoring their accomplishment. A school must have a workable, manageable improvement plan which is corporately developed and accepted.

Most state education departments are requiring this process and accreditation agencies are actively assisting schools in increasing pupil learning. Principals are urged to initiate meaningful discussions with faculty regarding responsible assessment and thereby stimulate the staff toward corporately and systematically engaging in the stages of school improvement.†



### **A Postscript**

We need to be reminded that there is nothing morbid about honestly confronting the fact of life's end, and preparing for it so that we may go gracefully and peacefully.

*--Billy Graham*

## *A Thousand Tongues To Sing*

### *Children At Worship*

One of the greatest blessings God has ever given me is the experience of teaching music in a racially-mixed, urban school. Corporate singing is alive and well in the Latino and African-American communities from which our students come, and we have many students of both sexes who are proud of their singing ability.

Teaching the traditional hymns, liturgy and choral music of the church has not been difficult, because such instruction has the full support of the staff, and a wealth of excellent materials is readily available. But finding similar printed materials of good quality for multicultural instruction has not been so easy. There are now publications on the market which help to fill this need. Two hymnal supplements, *Hymnal Supplement 1991* (GIA, pub.) And *With One Voice* (Augsburg-Fortress 1995) contain a variety of ethnically-derived hymnody and liturgical materials. Though they are not targeted specifically for children, they are both good tools for teaching. Here are some hymns from these books with specific suggestions for their use in worship.

*By the Babylonian Rivers* (#737 HS'91 and #656 WOV) A paraphrase of Psalm 137 set to a plaintive Latvian folk melody. Easily learned by children in grade three or above, this hymn might be used in addition to or in place of the appointed psalm, or as a response to one of the lessons. Its theme of journey from captivity fits perfectly with the lessons for Lent 2, but its penitential character makes it applicable to most of the Lenten season. Because of the folk-like quality of the melody, it might be effectively accompanied by guitar or autoharp. (This is a good way to involve student guitar players!)

*Soon and Very Soon* (#744 WOV) by gospel artist Andrae Crouch, would be a very appropriate addition to traditional hymns for the second or third Sundays of Easter. It could easily be learned by early childhood students. The keyboard edition of *With*

*One Voice* provides a stylistically accurate (but moderately challenging) gospel-style piano accompaniment. A simpler accompaniment appears in the pew edition, and this would be the better choice for use with young children.

*Gracious Spirit, Heed Our Pleading* (Wov #687) is a hymn from Africa. A good choice for Pentecost, the text's emphasis upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit would also make this hymn quite appropriate for confirmation or graduation services. Percussion parts are suggested with the keyboard accompaniment, but a rainstick could also add a unique sound.

The hymns listed above are, of course, only a small sampling of the range of materials in these supplements. If your congregation owns one of them, consider its possibilities as an educational resource.

Teaching children to appreciate the music of traditions outside their own is a simple way to teach them about the universality of the love of God. If your congregation is not racially or culturally diverse, explore these materials anyway. Your teaching and the lives of your students will be enriched.†

## Resources

*Hymnal Supplement 1991* is available from GIA Publications, 7404 S. Mason Ave., Chicago, IL 60638, Phone 1-800-GIA-1358.

*With One Voice* is available from Augsburg Fortress, 426 S. 5th St., Box 1209, Minneapolis, MN 55440, Phone 1-800-328-4648.



## Jobless Teacher

We all know that teachers often make financial sacrifices to pursue a career in education, and Christian school teachers often give even more.

My mother, a first grade teacher at Maranatha Christian School in Florence, South Carolina, was dismissing her students one afternoon when a girl in her class unknowingly epitomized the attitude that many students in Christian schools have about their teachers.

She asked, "Mrs. Donica, what do you do when we all get in our cars and go home?"

Smiling, Mother answered, "I get in my car and go home too."

Puzzled, the girl asked, "Don't you have a job?"

--Mary Kay Harllee

## *Small Groups In Youth Ministry*

*"How do we effectively serve the 200-plus kids that God has put before us?"*

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The basic question is not new or vastly different than anyone else working in youth ministry faces. It is essentially the same question whether the number is 20 or 220, whether one is new in a location or has been there 20 years. But a growing number of churches considered "large" by Lutheran standards face particular dilemmas because of the unique blessing of lots of "potential" kids.

- Why can't we attract more than 35 high schoolers on a regular basis, when we have over 100 on the rolls?
- Can we consistently do meaningful events for 30-75 or more youth?
- How many adult volunteers do we need to work with this many kids?
- Where do I find adults who are willing to stand in front of 50 teenagers?
- How do we effectively teach Confirmation classes with over 30 kids in a grade?
- As our church grows are we destined to have a larger percentage of "inactive" youth?

Good questions. Common questions among people in

youth ministry in medium size and larger congregations. Questions that can lead to frustration and to harsh words at board meetings.

Perhaps the answer lies in effective use of small groups. Here's some thinking and theory to stir yours.

### **Natural Group Limits**

Few groups of any type draw more than 20-30 people for a personal-sharing meeting. When groups are larger they adopt a more rigid, leader focused dynamic such as a public forum, a worship service, a rally or the like. It is rare to find a group of, say, 50 coming together on a regular basis for discussion or personal growth. When a youth ministry reaches a point where event or class attendance is regularly 25-35 they will almost never grow larger, regardless of church membership, leadership, or attractive events, *without a change in format and style*.

In addition, people and teens in particular like to organize themselves into small groups. Oh, we don't call them that, of course. We call them "friends," "basketball teams," "the choir," "the drum section," "the guys I hang out with." When we feel threatened by them we call them "cliques." When they turn violent we call them a "gang."

You already know that teens, while seeking individualization, go to great lengths to fit in with "the group." More important though, the observation here is that people enjoy and draw benefits from being closely associated with a small group that has common ground, probably 3-12 people sharing certain tastes, goals, values, interests, and the like.

Unfortunately, much of our youth ministry efforts has either ignored these facts or expended great effort to change them. But it is not necessary to change them; they are not inherently bad. Not bad at all. Our ministries will be enhanced and students will grow when we recognize these facts and use them as a tool.

### **Small Group Revolution**

You've probably read and discussed Carl George's *Prepare Your Church for the Future*. You've seen or been part of some form of adult small group ministry in the last five years. Perhaps you speak fluent *meta*. Bible Study Fellowship, Lighthouse, ChristCare, local names like HOME groups, TLC groups, LIFE groups. The theory goes that it's the way to do growth producing ministry in the 90's and beyond. And many of us have experienced these programs to become personal life-shaping and life giving forces.

You've also met the adults, solid Christian servants, who have said "not for me."

Are you like me? Have you asked “So what does this mean for youth ministry?” Perhaps, like me, you’ve tried various small group things and still wondered “So what does this mean for youth ministry?” when 8 showed up for the event you planned for 25!

### **What Can Be Gained?**

When we utilize small groups in youth ministry we open the door to a number of exciting possibilities. If we’re going to embark on a major restructure or ambitious addition to our programs we’d better know why. Here’s what can happen:

***More kids will be touched.*** As individuals are truly cared for they will care for others and bring others into the fellowship. Kids who before came occasionally and primarily to fulfill an obligation or to be entertained will experience personal care. Kids who have been looking for something meaningful behind the ritual of Church or the phoniness of a youth group will experience the depth they’ve desired.

***Faith will be made real.*** Just as for adults, when kids talk about their personal experiences with just a few others going through similar experiences, faith will take a more vital and visible role in their lives.

***Counselors/Youth Leaders jobs will be more focused and manageable.*** Most adults who care about kids can get a handle on trying to serve 3-9 youths. Give them the freedom to make this small group their primary concern of prayer, time, phone calls, ball game visits, etc. and they will experience more effectiveness and success, less frustration, and more joy.

***Counselor recruitment will be easier and more specific.*** Asking someone to build or work with a small group is not an easy task, but it’s one they can understand. It’s easier to say yes to than to being a “youth counselor” because its focus is much more specific.

***Kids will be in ministry to others.*** Without even knowing it, kids will take opportunity to encourage others. They will pray for their peers personally. They will follow up on each other’s problems and needs. They’ll think they are just being friends, but they’ll be learning and living the basics of a Christ-centered life.

***Groups will do ministry the large group can’t do.*** Some small groups will enjoy special servant roles of nursing home visitation, drama ministry, clean-up work, etc. More “service projects” may be accomplished than you could have ever programmed for the whole group.

***Sharing will be deeper, prayer lives will grow.*** Though discussions with 25 teens can be lively and sometimes intense, many people will simply not share their deepest thoughts, or even *anything* personal in a group that large. Small

groups will almost always elicit more personal feelings, and therefore lead to deeper growth. For some, prayers become more honest and flow easier off the lips. God's responses are more easily known and talked about in a small group setting.

***Parents will see the growth and appreciate the personal concern.*** In spite of our best efforts, it is sometimes shocking how our ministries are perceived as impersonal programs. "My son was excited and honored when Bob called and invited him to join his Discipleship group" is as much a statement of the parent's pleasure as the son's. As kids grow in the intimate setting of a small group, many will be empowered to be better communicators at home, and their enjoyment of the close fellowship will be perceived and pleasing to parents.

### **What Are The Risks?**

Like the benefits, we best be aware of what we are risking when we make a format change. Here are some common ones.

***You will spend a lot of time organizing.*** Retooling and recruiting adults, explaining the changes and opportunities to kids, leading a pilot group, educating boards and defending the changes to others. Phone calls, orientation sessions, more phone calls. It's a major effort to change an existing format.

***Not everyone will like it.*** Like adults, there will be kids, perhaps many at first, who will not want to change, and some who will genuinely not benefit from this format. Ministry is not one-size-fits-all. How will you serve these people?

***Results may not be quickly visible to others.*** Some in the Church are impressed by a full youth room. That's only natural. Small group ministry may not look impressive, especially at first, to those who are paying the bills or evaluating the effectiveness of the ministry. There will be those who long for the days "when we had 30 high schoolers up here on a Wednesday night," particularly if you eliminate an existing program to make room for small groups or move groups out of the building.

***You may wrestle with the best format and have to make mid-stream adjustments.*** There are a number of ways to carry out small group ministry. You probably won't strike gold on the first dig. Refinement is necessary in any system. People's concerns need to be heard and taken into account. The participants will have excellent ideas for improvement.

### **Changing the Format, Making it Work**

So, we need a format change in order to reach more than 30 senior high kids a week, and to better reach our 60 kids in 7th and 8th grade Confirmation. We believe the addition of small groups will serve more people more deeply than what

we're currently doing. We've tried a few things with mixed success. What exactly do we do? When do we do it? How do we choose groups? Who leads? What do we eliminate from our current system? How do we promote it? How long do we give it to work and how do we evaluate it?

***Within an existing program?*** One option is to do small groups as part of your regular Wednesday or Sunday night class or group time. This allows the leader to control the topics and timing and still affords some time for large group openings, closings, snacks, etc. I have found this to be a good *introduction* to small groups to help kids understand the dynamics and the benefits. It can give everyone a taste of what this is all about. What is usually lost, however, is the accountability, consistent attendance, and the distraction-free environment. Students who don't like the idea may feel that their old format has been taken away. It also requires you to form the groups a little more by force than you otherwise would. It does make a clear statement that this is an important and vital way to do ministry.

***New times, new places.*** A great way to try out small group ministry and test the waters of interest is to create a couple new options. Saturday morning breakfast Bible study at a restaurant, Thursday night girls group at the home of a counselor, Sunday afternoon basketball and Bible study for guys, etc. These groups will appeal to some because of the timing or other common interest and allow you to create a fresh program with no preconceived expectations. Once you hit on the ideas that work you can expand from there. These new times and places will always bring out a few kids who have held back from your existing programs. Perhaps they've been turned off or hurt by the large group, or they simply can't make it at that time. Try one group that is open to everyone, and at the same time one or two that are by invitation only, selecting kids who you believe to be particularly interested in this type of format.

***Leadership.*** Adult leaders, youth leaders or both? While kids can be trained to lead effectively, and there is great value in peer leadership, I believe a youth-adult co-leader model has the most advantages. Teens need every adult mentor, friend, and role model they can get. Train the youth and adult as a team. Allow them to be involved in recruiting and forming the group. Give them ownership over the topics and timing. The ministry may explode around you.

***Confirmation.*** Secure a classroom that can accommodate several small groups . . . They listen to and participate in Pastor's presentation for 45 minutes, then discuss personal application with their "Guide" and 4 or 5 friends for 30 minutes. They finish with some prayer time, and they plan out a service project or a fellowship event for their small group to accomplish next month. It is the successful and growing model of Pastor Rich Melheim and the Faith Incubators



Project (201 E. Burlington, Stillwater, MN 55082). Students get a personal sense of faith and they establish Christ-centered relationships.

***Groups grow out of friendships and common interests.*** Perhaps the most significant factor affecting initial success is how the groups are formed. You *must* allow some degree of choice. If the groups are an optional new program, recruit the leaders and have them invite individuals to join their groups. When someone feels left out because they weren't invited, ask them to start their own group or invite them to a group that has space. If your small groups are part of an existing program, allow participants to sign up in pairs or trios. In either case, with friends or people with common interests there is a much greater chance of open sharing taking place. There's a saying, "Cliques are not a problem if everyone is in one." There is an applicable truth here, but even better, your small groups will not be cliques because there will not be animosity or extreme exclusivity. Membership is restricted, but there must always be an open chair with an eye toward growth and birthing a new group.

### **Is It Worth It?**

Small groups should not be seen as the only way a Church does youth ministry. They are, however, an important high-touch tool that can work powerfully in this keep-your-distance world. They will require time to develop and refine, and there are things that work and things that don't. You will likely need 2-3 years to grow into a system you feel is productive.

Large group events can now take on a more celebrative tone or be "special events" instead of a weekly meeting. Small groups can lead events that are designed for 35-70 and don't have to include personal discussion. Leaders will know they are making a difference. Relationships will be deepened, Christ will be glorified. You will serve more kids more effectively than before.✠



### **On Youth**

What old people tell you you cannot do, you try and find you can . . . I am convinced that to maintain ourself on this earth is not a hardship, but a pastime, if we may live simply and wisely.

*--Henry David Thoreau*

## *Going for the Gold!*

Like many other teenagers on their confirmation day, one of the gifts I received was a copy of my very own hymnal. There was no doubt it was mine--my name and the date of my confirmation were prominently announced on the cover. What was even more impressive, they were engraved *in gold!*

Having one's own copy of the hymnal made an important statement. It may not have been all that clear to that young confirmand some fifty-three years ago, but the implication was clear. Here--along with the Bible and catechism--was an important book. (The gold engraving said that!) Here was an important treasury of the church's song, a place to go for comfort and consolation, a body of song to buoy one up through the trials and vicissitudes of life. And where its use was reinforced at home as hymns were sung around the piano and at the table for family devotions, the importance of that book grew.

Is it too simplistic to connect the decline in the use of the great hymns of the church among today's young people with the abandonment of the practice of giving a special copy of the hymnal to young people on their confirmation day? Probably so. More factors are undoubtedly involved: worship leaders themselves unacquainted with the heritage of the church's song, or the notion (an incorrect one, as any music teacher can testify) that young people can't learn many hymns or simply don't like them. But I can't help but see something of a connection, at least a symbolic one.

Many parents--and, unfortunately, some teachers and pastors--don't see the passing on of a heritage of hymns as a high priority. Hymns are seen less as a vehicle for proclamation, praise, and instruction in the faith, and more as a gimmick for attracting and holding people's attention.

Perhaps a first step would be to encourage a return to the practice of giving each confirmand their own hymnal. Godparents,

*First*

*Person*

*Singular*

parents, or even congregations could be the givers. Then the hymnal's regular and systematic use needs to be encouraged in home, school, and church.

Each of our grandchildren receives their own copy of the hymnal on their confirmation day. Hopefully, they receive it as a sign of growing maturity in the faith, growing responsibility in the Christian community, and as a resource for their entire life as a Christian.

Every parent, godparent, and congregation might well consider doing the same. The impact of this simple gesture could have an impact far beyond confirmation day. By the way, when deciding on the engraving, go for the gold!✠



## **Writing for the Church**

The Educational Development Department of Concordia Publishing House (CPH) in cooperation with Concordia College, Seward, NE, will offer its popular "*Writing for the Church*" workshop this summer at Concordia, Seward, NE, July 14-20, 1996. The workshop will be staffed by The Rev. Dr. Earl H. Gaulke, CPH Vice President of the Editorial Division and Jane Fryar, Editor of VBS Materials.

Workshop objectives include helping participants to:

- (1) know the elements of effective written communication;
- (2) recognize the need for effective written communication in the church, and by the church for the world;
- (3) develop creative writing and editing skills through regular practice; and
- (4) commit themselves to witnessing through the written word as they communicate the Good News of grace and forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

Concordia, Seward, will award 1 - ½ semester hours of graduate or undergraduate credit to participants (\$225 tuition and fees). Or the workshop may be taken for continuing education units (CEU) (\$225). On-campus lodging and meals for the week will be \$150. Participants will also need to purchase a textbook.

Mail your application for the workshop to: Writing for the Church Workshop, c/o Dr. LeeRoy Holtzen, Concordia College, 800 North Columbia Avenue, Seward, NE, 68434 (Phone: 402/643-7471) (Alternate Phone: 402/643-7230) [FAX: 402/643-4073] [E-Mail: [lholtzen@seward.ccsn.edu](mailto:lholtzen@seward.ccsn.edu)].

## *The Little Girl Who Couldn't Smile*

Perhaps you remember the story a few months ago about a seven year-old girl in the Los Angeles area who was having surgery to repair some nerves that would allow her to smile. For all seven years of her young life, she has been unable to smile because of this condition.

We hope and pray that the surgery went well, and that she will be able to smile at the world around her. What a sad incident of a person who has been unable to share her feelings and joys in a way that so many of us take so much for granted.

But as I thought more about this little one, it also struck me that it is a sad commentary that so many of us who have the correct functioning nerves in our face fail to use the gift of smiling as much as we could!

I remember the sneer I made at the rude motorist that almost forced me off the road. Or the non-smiley approach I give to telemarketers who call. They can't see my face, but they can probably figure out that I'm not smiling! Or the times when I forget to use the simple gift of a smile with even members of my own family or staff.

In a sense, the Lord "operated" on all of us when he came into the world to be born, live, suffer, die and rise again. He continues to turn the frowns of sin into the festivities of freedom. He changes our Good Fridays into Easters!

The little girl who couldn't smile really has a message for us. She has no doubt brought much joy and many smiles to her parents and other loved ones around her, even though she was not able to physically give a smile back to them. And each of us is called to bring health and hope and happiness to the people that God puts into our lives--even today!

It's an old saying, but it still works-- "If you see a person without a smile, give her/him one of yours!" Or one of my favorites still is, "If you love Jesus, why don't you tell

your face about it?”

Smiling is just one way to share your faith with others. Smiling, in a sense, is another way of crossing ourselves! It affirms the fact that the Spirit continues to give new life and new hope to us, even in the midst of the “frowns” of life.

In a study by the University of Michigan some years ago, it was found that the average elementary school person (whoever that is!) smiles and laughs 150 times a day. On the other hand the average adult (whoever that is!) smiles and laughs 15 times a day. Now you may think that according to some adults you know, that sounds a bit high for adults, but the point is, God has given us many ways to share the joy and faith that we receive each day as a gift. And one way to do that is through smiles and laughter.

Why not try this experiment: take a good look at yourself in the mirror. Practice smiling. Perhaps this is best done when you are all alone in your private bathroom! Practice smiling at yourself in the mirror every day and see how you look to others. Not bad! And now go out and do it in the world!

Use this same smile as you go about your ministries for the next week. Flash it to your class, to your staff, to your family, and even to that rude driver on the road beside you.

As we encourage each other to smile and share the joy of the Lord, we also need to encourage each other to cry with each other as we struggle through the hurts and pains of life. And as we continue to give people permission to cry and smile, the good news is that the Lord is there in the midst of the hurts and hoorays, enabling us to share our feelings with people around us who can support and comfort and rejoice with us.

There is certainly much more to our faith than simply smiling all day. But smiles are one way to connect with people and allow them to know that the Lord is certainly alive and well in our hearts and lives!

Proverbs 15:13 says it well: “A happy heart makes the face cheerful . . .” And a forgiving Lord allows us to share this joy with others through the gift of smiles!

Smiling is contagious--let's pray for an epidemic!

Thanks, Lord, for that little girl who couldn't smile. Hopefully, she too is lighting up the world with her new found gift! Help us do like-wise!✚

## Windows and Words

It was a long time ago, but I still remember Angela. She, like all the four year olds in the class, was eager to learn. She was an intense, curious child, one who listened carefully to new ideas and worked hard to sort them into the concepts she already had. She was especially eager to hear about Jesus.

As Christmas came near, we talked about the Baby Jesus, and about the fact that he was God, come to us as a baby. Everyone in the class was eagerly awaiting Christmas, especially Angela!

One day her hand rose tentatively to ask a question. *Do you really think that Jesus is God?* Yes, I answered. *He really is God.*

Later that day, Angela confided in me that her parents didn't think that Jesus was God. *I asked them*, she said, *and they said they don't think so. I think I'll ask them again.*

Having spoken with Angela's parents on several occasions, I knew something of her dilemma. Her parents had been brought up as Christians, but now considered themselves agnostics. They hadn't been to the Catholic parish of their youth for many years. Even though I had made it clear to them that ours was a Christian school where the children learned about Jesus, they chose to send Angela to us.

*Dear Lord, I prayed. Let your word rest in Angela. Give her peace and confidence . . . and courage!*

Days went by, and we continued our preparations for Christmas. In the busy-ness of those preparations, I put my concerns about Angela and her family on the back burner.

Then came January, and our discussion of the Magi who followed the star to find Jesus. Again Angela raised her hand. *Teacher*, she said, *I told my mom and dad about the baby Jesus. And I decided something. I decided that Jesus really IS God. My mom and dad still aren't sure, but I am!*

Teaching  
the  
Young

What a thrill her announcement was! Each story about Jesus was totally new to Angela. She had never heard the good news before. Each story was received with interest, with questions, with deep thought.

Again I prayed for Angela and for guidance in talking to her parents. Would they be angry? Would they transfer Angela to another, "less Christian" school?

My ministry to Angela and her family was challenging. Because our class was an intimate part of the congregation, the children intermittently sang for Sunday worship. Angela and her family always participated. Others among the parents reached out to Angela's parents, making sure they were comfortable and welcomed.

I have long since lost track of Angela and her family, even though I have thought of them often, each time with a prayer for their spiritual health. I have often wondered if I could have done more, said more, enlisted the help and prayers of more in the congregation . . . The list goes on. I continue to wonder if I ministered actively enough to those parents who so casually entrusted Angela to us in spite of who we were.

Many of you may have a similar story to tell. As a teacher in a Lutheran School or Child Care Center, you, too, tell children about Jesus. You have an important ministry to the children entrusted to you. Your task is more than education. It is a spiritual ministry of equipping the saints. That ministry extends beyond the children to their families.

Those families are important! Angela was entrusted to me for such a brief time--one school year. I had contact with her parents for yet another year, as her younger sister also enrolled in my class. But that's still a short part of a lifetime.

Angela's parents had the long-term influence on her. Their ideas, their beliefs, their moral and ethical standards would, in the long run, have a great influence on Angela. Would my teaching have a chance against such odds?

Our ability to help parents understand the perspective we have is important. Our attitude toward those parents is critical. Since Angela's younger sister also attended our school, my ability to help the parents feel comfortable with the ministry aspects of our school must have been successful. But did I reach out actively enough to them? Even after the dimming of time, my answer still is that I probably didn't.

I do remember visits to their home, and conversations with her mother at various points along the way. I also remember the content of several conversations. The gentle reminders of her long-ago faith. The testimony of what I was teaching Angela in the classroom.

I suppose none of us ever think we have done enough. That feeling is particularly poignant when we lose touch with people and are not privy to the outcome this side of heaven. I like to think that Angela is an active Christian woman today. I trust that the Holy Spirit has fanned the fire of faith which was kindled so many years ago.

As a teacher, I know that it is my calling to plant the seed, light the fire, set the stage . . . take your choice of metaphor. It is the Holy Spirit who is in charge of the heart! That, however, does not diminish my responsibility, both in my classroom and in the congregation. It is my task to tell, to lead, to witness. It is my task to minister, to serve, to affirm. My ministry must go beyond the walls of my classroom. It must.

Recent studies such as the Church Membership Initiative (CMI) indicate that it is the responsibility of everyone in the parish to reach out to visitors and newcomers. It is the challenge of leaders--teachers *and* pastors--to provide the example. That example begins with the parents and families of the children under our care. But it continues to the full congregation, especially to the families of young children. It is those families, inside the school/center or not, who most look to early childhood teachers for encouragement and example.

There's an Angela in almost every classroom today. Are you listening to her? Are you answering her questions, especially those she cannot yet voice? Are you connecting with her parents? Are you giving them reason to look to you for support and answers?

Another lesser-known discovery of the CMI is that the unchurched families of children in early childhood centers do not become members quickly. It often takes a crisis in their lives to bring them to ask for help and support. How congregations respond to that cry for help can determine whether those families see Jesus through us as we minister to their needs. So it's not just the children who need to see Jesus and his love in the day-to-day things you do. It's also their parents. Be a window. Let whole families see Jesus through *your* relationship with him.✝



### **A Prayer for Patience**

“O Lord, I know that I am not yet perfect, and hence I pray for the gift of patience. Please give it to me right now. Amen.”



## *“Easter Made Personal”*

The blessings of a Christian family and upbringing are innumerable. One possible disadvantage, however, was shared with me some years ago by a friend whose youth was anything but Christian, but who had come to faith as an adult. He told me, “You don’t know what the darkness is like.”

This is, of course, in no way a call to expose ourselves or our children to the darkness of life without Jesus Christ. It is to suggest, rather, that one of the challenges which faces us constantly, both personally and in relation to others as parents or teachers, is to retain a sense of awe and joy and surprise at “the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9)—even when that call came at a very early age.

Among the greatest facets of this challenge are the great days of the Church Year, especially the greatest of those days, Easter. How easily we can fall into an essentially pagan world view of seeing Easter as part of an endless, repeating cycle, with little more profound to say than, “Easter falls early (or late) this year.” Thus, the “feast of victory for our God” becomes banal.

While there is no formula to ensure the vibrancy of faith, there are some important considerations for parents and teachers which can benefit both themselves and those in their spiritual charge. First, it is essential that Easter not be seen as something long ago and far away. Rather, in keeping with the Church’s insight that every Sunday is a “little Easter,” we must emphasize that Easter has transformed our own weekly and daily reality—every week and every day. One of the best ways to teach this is by linking Easter with each individual Christian’s baptism. Baptism may well be defined as “Easter made personal,” as that moment when each of us began our eternal life as the adopted child of the heavenly Father. Luther suggested that baptism be

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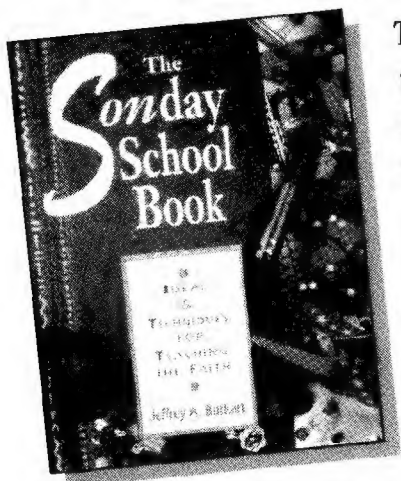
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remembered daily with the sign of the holy cross, not as a pious or even superstitious symbol, but as a recollection of the sign made at the washing of water joined with the Word of promise. Even the smallest children can be taught this devotional act and its essential meaning, with a lifetime's worth of greater depth and appreciation lying ahead.

Christians of all ages can also be taught the connection of Easter with death. However young they are when they first encounter death, Christians can come to appreciate that they may well mourn, but not as those who lack hope. Here, too, visual symbols can help teach eternal truths, as the same pascal candle which is lighted at the altar during the Easter season and at the font for baptisms is placed at the casket before the altar during funerals. Those who know that "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:5) at Easter know that the same Light "has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6), come what may. Whether or not to take children to funerals is, of course, a personal, parental judgment, but a word may be spoken in its favor, if the service is considered as a "teachable moment" and the circumstances allow for careful preparations and debriefing.

Otherwise put, our concern must be to break down as fully as possible the wall which our culture has erected between our lives as spiritual beings and "real life." From the first, before they learn otherwise, children need to learn the truth of what British playwright Dorothy Sayers wrote of the crucifixion: "From the beginning of time until now, this is the only thing that has ever really happened." A child who learns the daily significance of Easter--from baptism to the grave--is a child well equipped for "real life" and really living.✠

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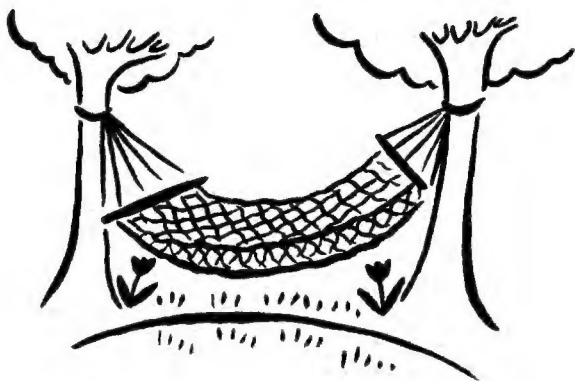
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